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Abstract

Compression of laser pulses to $< \sim 1\text{-}10$ ps duration using stimulated Raman scattering (SRS) in a plasma promises to provide unprecedented power and intensity for a variety of applications, by avoiding the limits to fluence and intensity that are needed to avoid damage to the solid state optics that are used in conventional approaches. In particular, the ability to compress pump beam pulses of \sim ns duration will allow present facilities with 10's kJ to over a MJ of energy to produce ultra short pulses efficiently, advancing applications in; fusion by fast ignition, x-ray production of high energy density experiments, as well as laser driven particle accelerators. We will discuss a series of experiments to demonstrate the needed beam amplification rate, and focal spot quality in a $< 3\text{mm}$ plasma with the properties needed for compression of these pulses ($n_e \sim 10^{19}/\text{cm}^3$, T_e 200 to 300 eV) when the plasma is extended. The experiments use He plasmas produced with a 300 J, 1 ns, beam at the Jupiter Laser facility to amplify a counter-propagating, ultra-short pulse (USP) seed by a factor of 10x to 37x and study the dependence of the amplification, the associated non-linear wave response, and the resulting beam quality and energy, on the intensity of both seed and pump beam. In particular, a regime in which amplification of USP beams is achieved while maintaining a low angular divergence of the beam consistent with good focal spot quality will be discussed.